

*6 March 2006*  
*Monday*

## READINGS

Psalm 41; Genesis 37:1-11; I Corinthians 1:1-19; Mark 1:1-13

## DEVOTION

Recently, I found myself engaged in a friendly conversation with some senior (“real-old” like me) soldiers about the Army values dog tags and cards that are now issued to soldiers. The banter went something like, “Back in the day, we didn’t need these things. We just knew better,”.....

Although the conversation was just an uneventful run of the mill exchange like many others that we have as the days pass, the subject stuck in my mind. I thought to myself, as the senior people in our organizations, how often do we make an honest effort to champion these great values? All are of equal importance, none outweighs the other. When I received and read the biblical passages I was to use to as a guide to write this Lenten Devotional, the conversation again came back to me, and the value of “selfless service” jumped to the forefront.

The Holy Bible has many examples of people who lived by this value, but none exemplify selfless service better than Saint John, The Baptist. Mark 1:1-13 tells the story of St. John’s selfless service to both God and to the Messiah. I have read this section of the book of Mark many times, but only in the context as the story of Jesus’ Baptism, not John’s service to something greater than himself. By the time Jesus had come to Him to be baptized, John’s fame as a holy man of God was wide-spread. Mark 1:5 tells us, “All the land of Judea went out to him.” This indicates the sweeping impact of his ministry, as John was perhaps the leading religious figure outside of official and rabbinic Judaism of the time. Luke 1:36 tells us that Jesus and John were related through their mothers, and were perhaps acquainted with each other. John had been chosen by God before his birth to be the forerunner of the Messiah. In our modern terms, he had very important connections. John, in his own right, was a very important man, who could, if he wished, influence a great number of people.

We all know the story of Jesus’ temptation, but what of John’s? I thought to myself, there is no biblical reference to John ever being tempted, but, all of that fame, people from far and wide sought him out and all that delegated authority based on the word of the prophets. What would I have done in his place? Could I have resisted using this unique situation for personal gain or position to serve myself over the common good or the mission at hand?

What John did was to selflessly serve. He prophesied the coming of the Messiah, one greater than himself. He did his task as part of something greater. Mark 1:7 quotes John as saying, “I prepare the way for one immeasurably greater than I, whose sandal strap I am unworthy to stoop down and loose.” What an incredible act of humility and service.

No matter what rank or position we hold, placing self interest last and serving with total commitment acts as a beacon of conduct that serves to inspire those around us to do likewise, no matter how difficult a mission or task might become. Just as John’s work was crucial to Jesus’ ministry, the work that we do, no matter what that work might be, is part of and crucial to something much greater. In the competitive world we live in, it is sometimes very difficult to take self interest out of the picture and place self last.

As I close, I am looking at this little piece of plastic with the words “Selfless Service” printed on it and I realize that John, The Baptist and Forerunner, was our perfect example of a man who set the standard for this Army value, a very long time ago.

**MAJ John Penree, 3rd COSCOM G6**